

Regional Park Manager's Report

Pentland Hills Regional Park Consultative Forum

18th November 2011

Purpose of report

- 1 To update the Consultative Forum about operational matters and other current issues to be discussed at the Consultative Forum on 18th November 2011.

Main report

Midlothian Snow Sports Centre / Hillend Country Park

- 2 Midlothian Council had developed a draft Stage 1 Planning Brief for the development of land within Hillend Country Park adjacent to Midlothian Snow Sports Centre. The draft brief aims to set out how appropriate development may be enabled within the Country Park to support the longer term financial viability of the Snow Sports Centre. Midlothian Council Officials made a presentation to the Regional Park Joint Committee on the 22nd July. The Joint Committee asked that Midlothian Council make a further presentation to the Joint Committee on 16th December. For further information, please refer to the Joint Committee Paper of the 22nd July 2011 also circulated.
- 3 Following allocation of £553,000 of Capital Funding from Sportscotland, Midlothian Council is planning to upgrade and extend the facilities at the Snow Sports Centre. A planning application has been submitted for works including the expansion of slope area and provision and associated infrastructure. Full details of the application (Reference 11/00675/DPP) can be viewed on the Midlothian Council Website (www.midlothian.gov.uk).

Car Parking Charges

- 4 At its meeting of 22nd July 2011, following consideration of the results on an informal consultation exercise, the Regional Park Joint Committee agreed in principle to the introduction of car parking charges at Threipmuir, Harlaw, Bonaly and Flotterstone. The Committee further requested that papers be presented to the appropriate Committees in the City of Edinburgh and Midlothian Councils recommending that the required Traffic Regulation Order process be initiated.
- 5 A report will be presented to Edinburgh's Transport, Infrastructure and Environment Committee on 23rd November and to the equivalent Midlothian Committee in December. If the recommendations are accepted, it is likely that

the TRO process will be initiated early in 2012 which will include a further formal consultation exercise during which comments and objections can be made. The process can take between nine and twelve months, meaning that charging schemes could not be introduced until 2013 at the earliest. The Consultative Forum will be provided with regular updates including the outcome of any Committee decisions and planned consultation timetables.

Dog Fouling Initiative at Harlaw

- 6 The Regional Park Countryside Ranger Service had been trying a new approach to tackling dog fouling at Harlaw Reservoir. Starting in August, new fouling has been sprayed on a daily basis with biodegradable high visibility paint. Additionally, the amount of new fouling has been recorded and publicised on local notices along with information about the offence and how to walk your dog responsibly. The initiative aims to highlight the scale of the problem and by doing so encourage people to clear up behind their dog.
- 7 The marking exercise has been supplemented by support from the South West Community Safety Team (Environmental Warden Service) carrying out uniformed and plain clothed operations to target offending behaviour.
- 8 As a longer term approach the Regional Park is planning to introduce a Green Dog Walkers Scheme, initially based at Harlaw. The scheme involves the Countryside Ranger Service working with regular dog walkers using the site to encourage responsible dog walking through peer group pressure and positive role modelling.

Access to and from the Regional Park

- 9 The Regional Park previously secured funding from Phase 1 of the Central Scotland Green Network Development fund to carry out a study into improving the links to and from communities in the immediate vicinity of the Regional Park. In December 2010 Land Use Consultants (LUC) were commissioned to carry out the work.
- 10 The project is now completed and has three key outputs:
 - Identification, survey and description of existing routes and potential for improvement.
 - Appraisal of individual routes.
 - Detailed specifications for improving four selected routes.
- 11 The study provides an overview of the existing access provision and a suite of suggestions for improvements. More detailed specifications were drawn up for four selected routes (Water of Leith to Bonaly Country Park, Redford Road to Bonaly Country Park, Bush Estate to Flotterstone, Penicuik to Kirk Road End, and Selm Muir Wood to Little Vantage).
- 12 The study is available to any community group or organisation who might have an interest in improving access on the periphery of the Park. In all cases, further liaison and landowner agreement and funding commitment would be

required prior to implementation. Copies can be made available by contacting the Regional Park via www.pentlandhills.org.

Path Condition and Usage

- 13 Wet weather during summer 2011 caused several paths in the hills to become muddy and subject to erosion. While access rights apply to the majority of paths and tracks, the Scottish Outdoor Access code highlights the need to prevent erosion and damage and to follow agreed local information. The Regional Park provides guidance to mountain bikers and horse riders about responsible usage of the path system including information about the more suitable routes. This information is provided via leaflets, on the Regional Park website, and is re-enforced by colour coded markers at access points to key routes. Some of the erosion however may be worsened by cyclists and riders using routes that are not suitable either because of their inherent characteristics, or because of the ground conditions at the time of use. The Regional Park would like to explore with the Consultative Forum and others what further measures might reduce inappropriate path usage while remaining consistent with access rights under Part 1 Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

Memorial Request

- 13 The Regional Park has received a request to provide a memorial item in the Harlaw area. A Policy for memorials on local authority owned land within the Regional Park was approved by the Joint Committee on 14th January 2011. Consistent with the Policy the Regional Park has discussed options with the relative and proposed that some seating perches are provided adjacent to the Black Springs path. This would provide an additional amenity for people with limited mobility and be consistent with the provision of perches already made on the main Harlaw reservoir path. The opinion of the Consultative Forum is sought prior to going ahead.

Protected Areas Review

- 9 The Pentland Hills Regional Park currently has International Union of Nature Conservation (IUCN) Category 5 Protected Area Status. The IUCN UK Committee are currently undertaking a project called 'Putting Nature on the Map' which aims to identify, classify and map all protected areas in the UK and to make this information freely available to UK decision makers.
- 10 In November, the Regional Park Manager attended a meeting with Scottish Natural Heritage and managers of existing or potential protected areas in Scotland. The Regional Park Manager will be working with Scotland's other Regional Parks to make a case for Regional Parks retaining their protected area status as part of Scotland's contribution to 'Putting Nature on the Map' exercise.

Regional Park Funding and Service Review

- 11 At its meeting of 22nd July 2011, the Regional Park Joint Committee asked that the funding basis for 2012/13 and beyond be reviewed with the three local authority partners. This follows the removal of grant income from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) static or reduced contribution from partners, inflationary budget pressures and a disproportionate and unsustainable increase in the funding contribution from the managing authority (City of Edinburgh Council).
- 12 Officers are currently working to confirm the budget available for 2012/13 and to define the level of service that can be provided. A further detailed report will be presented to the Joint Committee in due course.

Financial Implications

- 13 This report serves to update the Consultative Forum about recent operational matters. There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Equalities Impact

- 14 There is no equalities impact arising from this update report. A separate equalities impact assessment will be made of the proposal to introduce car parking charges as part of the report to Committee.

Environmental Impact

- 15 The aims of the Regional Park and work of Regional Park Service aim to conserve and enhance the environmental quality and responsible public enjoyment of the area.

Recommendations

- 16 It is recommended that the Consultative Forum notes the contents of this report.

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Appendices None

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Wards affected All

Single Outcome Agreement

- 1 We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe.
- 2 We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people.
- 6 We live longer, healthier lives.
- 10 We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.
- 11 We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.
- 12 We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations
- 13 We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity.
- 14 We reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production.
- 15 Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.

Background Papers

1. Improving Access Routes between the Pentland Hills Regional Park and Surrounding Communities (Land Use Consultants June 2011)
2. Papers for the Pentland Hills Regional Park Joint Committee held on 22nd July 2011.